
STRATEGIC ISSUES RELATED TO MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT
GOAL INDICATORS

Report by UNSD

This report comprises two sections. The first one presents an update of recent and ongoing activities addressing the needs for improving data and internationally agreed methods for effective monitoring of progress towards the MDGs. The second section lays out a table on strategic and technical issues related to MDG indicators and monitoring, listing for each issue the roles of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators and the potential contribution by CCSA. The table is intended as a framework to facilitate CCSA's assessment on the work needed by international organizations to support countries in the production of the necessary data for MDG monitoring.

Update on ongoing activities

Over the past three years, as commitments to the MDGs have crystallized, governments, agencies and donors have mobilized around the need to monitor progress towards the MDGs, identified the statistical programme requirements for effective and sustained monitoring, addressing these needs in a concerted fashion.

The availability of data necessary to compile the indicators in each country and in international data series depends on the capacities of national statistical services. Improved statistical information is the necessary basis for producing the indicators to monitor progress towards the Millennium Declaration Goals and for informing the necessary policies to bring about changes to successfully move towards the agreed targets. Building statistical capacity in countries and strengthening international agencies' statistical work and coordination are fundamental components of the work to achieve the Millennium goals of poverty eradication and development.

Better statistics have thus assumed a critical role in the MDG agenda. It is now fully and widely recognized that much needs to be done if adequate data are to be available for national and international evidence-based monitoring and reviews of progress towards the MDGs and for designing and implementing the policies and programmes needed to achieve them.

A major step in turning this recognition into action for statistical development was the endorsement of "The Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics—Better Data for Better Results, An Action Plan for Improving Development Statistics", presented at the Second International Roundtable on Managing for Development Results, held in Marrakech 4-5 February 2004. (Available at <http://www.worldbank.org/data/results.html>)

At the Roundtable, the World Bank, the regional development banks, the Chairman of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and developing countries' ministers

all expressed strong support for the six-point action plan; the United Nations Statistical Commission added its endorsement at its session in March 2004.

The Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics builds on existing initiatives and country experience to set out broad sets of actions needed to improve statistics at both national and international levels, including mainstreaming strategic planning of statistical systems, strengthening preparations for the 2010 census, increasing financial support for statistical capacity building, and setting up an international household survey network.

The Inter-agency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators contributes to the efforts for improving statistical capacity in countries, to the further methodological development of MDG indicators and to improve inter-agency coordination in the related activities.

Work is underway and has been planned also in other areas. The Statistics Division is collaborating closely with UNDP in the implementation of the project ‘Building Capacity and statistical literacy for MDG monitoring at the country level’. UNDP and the Statistics Division have worked together on the development of the training material and the training of trainers, including holding a workshop to bring together all agencies involved in MDG monitoring. The training material will be presented at the next Inter-agency and expert meeting in Geneva, on September 27 to obtain feedback from the agencies, and to be tested in a pilot training workshop in the fall of 2004.

A training programme on the preparation of MDG indicators for countries in developing regions, is being organized by UN-Habitat, UNFPA and UNSD. The first workshop, covering 27 countries, the majority of which in sub-Saharan Africa, will be held in Nairobi, Kenya, December 6-10, 2004.

Improved information has also been identified by the task forces of the United Nations Millennium Project as a prerequisite for better policy formulation and planning of programmes. For instance, improved international data systems are called for by the task force on gender, which recommends that donors commit to strengthening ILO and WHO efforts to work with countries in collecting, standardizing, and disseminating gender-disaggregated data and statistics in the areas of informal employment, gender wage gaps and prevalence rates of violence against women. The call for information is echoed by other task forces—in particular, the one dealing with child and maternal health and mortality. This task force places a great emphasis on improving indicators of reproductive health and developing country-owned strong vital registration systems.

As an advisory body to the UN, the Millennium Project will report its findings directly to the UN Secretary-General and the Administrator of the UNDP by early 2005. The interim reports of all task forces are already available at the Millennium Project website: <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org>

The development and application of standard statistical concepts and methods for national and international use in compiling data for the MDG indicators has also been an important preoccupation of the MDG Inter-agency and Expert meetings and consultations. The publication by DESA of the UNDG manual on the definitions, rationale, concepts and sources of data for MDG indicators is important outcome in this area and represents an invaluable instrument for those engaged in the compilation of MDG indicators at national level.

The Inter-agency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators also coordinates the activities of thematic sub-groups to improve existing international standards and guidelines for the preparation of MDG indicators, in areas that need more urgent attention—such as poverty, gender equality and women empowerment, environment, slums and employment.

At the level of international methodologies, at CCSA's request, the Inter-agency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators considered the report by Prof. Tim Holt, commissioned by ILO, on technical issues related to the imputation of missing values and aggregation of country data to regional and global figures. ILO, the World Bank and UNSD have initiated work to collect more detailed information on agencies' methodologies and practices. ILO is planning to circulate a questionnaire among the partner agencies to gather information on techniques and models and policies for the imputation of missing values, their presentation, dissemination and inclusion in regional aggregates, and for the analysis of trends.

Data users have repeatedly asked for clarifications on methods used by agencies for imputation of missing values and estimation of regional aggregates. It is extremely important for the agencies to fully document their methodology and estimation procedures. The information provided by the agencies will be used by the Inter-agency Group and UNSD to provide users of the MDG indicators—including national governments and the international community—with a better understanding of how the estimates are produced. Agencies would have to be accountable for the methods and data presented. In addition, the information will be crucial to meet one of the Inter-agency Group's objectives of improving methods for regional aggregations and imputation of missing values.

Strategic and technical issues related to the development of MDG Indicators

Issues	Activities	Role of MDG IAEG	Role of CCSA
1. Development of data for MDG indicators at the national level	Capacity building project on statistical literacy; Training of NSO staff on the production of MDG indicators; other capacity building activities, such as the dissemination of DevInfo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange of information among agencies • Review of technical issues—such as definitions and methods adopted in guidelines and training in countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss TC priorities to ensure consistency with policies at agency level
2. Methodological developments 2.1 Technical guidelines to countries	Development of guidelines for countries; Publication of technical handbooks on MDG Indicators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise on needed changes/revision of previous edition • Provide technical inputs for the preparation of the manual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review concepts, definitions and methods to ensure consistency with general institutional policies at agency level
2.2 Development of meta data for MDG Indicators where needed	Review of concepts and methods in key areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and discuss concepts, definitions and methods to ensure consistency across agencies • Review and discuss country practices to ensure adherence of defined indicators to countries' needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review concepts, definitions and methods to ensure consistency with general institutional policies at agency level

2.3 Practices for values imputation and aggregation of data to regional and global aggregates	Develop methods and guidelines for regional aggregations and imputation of missing values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss results and agree on proposed approach and guidelines. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote inter-agency collaboration; review MDG IAEG's agreement to be implemented within agencies.
3. Review of the MDG indicators	MDG IEG Sub-groups and MDG IEG discussions on agencies/experts proposals: Task forces of the MP recommendations; Baltimore Group on Proximate Indicators (Health Metrics).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review MDG IEG Sub-groups' proposals for changes to the indicators; preparation of suggestions to be considered by the S-G's office and inter-governmental process in 2005. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review MDG IAEG's proposals and provide institutional backing and support for the development of necessary data.
4. Resources mobilization	Recommendations of the Marrakech Action Plan Recommendations and strategies of the UN MP Health Metrics Network		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic decisions on institutional resources • Coordination of resources allocation • Establish priorities

